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FORMER DEPARTMENT OF STATE AGENT AND NORTHERN VIRGINIA REALTOR PLEAD GUILTY TO VISA FRAUD

WASHINGTON – Harold Countryman, a former Department of State agent, and his wife, Kimberly Countryman, a realtor in northern Virginia, pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting visa fraud, the Justice Department announced today. According to the plea agreement, Kimberly Countryman admitted to using the fraudulent visa to further the forced labor of a Cambodian woman in their employ.

Sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 13, 2006, before U.S. District Judge Gerald Bruce Lee. As part of the plea agreement, the Countrymans are required to pay \$50,000 in restitution and \$50,000 in forfeiture. Visa fraud carries a statutory maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$250,000.

“This plea makes clear that those individuals who use fraud to thwart our immigration laws and take advantage of the most vulnerable members of our society will be aggressively prosecuted,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division.

“Citizens and non-citizens alike deserve to be treated with dignity and respect,” said Chuck Rosenberg, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. “We trust this case sends a clear message to anyone tempted to put others into forced labor through violence and intimidation: do not even think about taking advantage of these vulnerable people. The law forbids forced labor and we will enforce that law vigorously.”

According to court documents, the couple provided materially false information to the Department of State to obtain a visa on behalf of a Cambodian woman, who they then brought to the United States to work for them as a domestic servant for two years.

In the plea agreement, Kimberly Countryman admitted that she procured the visa with reason to believe that the visa would be used to commit a felony, namely forced labor. As a result, Kimberly Countryman is subject to an increase in her sentence. Kimberly Countryman acknowledged that she withheld a portion of the woman’s pay, took possession of the woman’s passport, and physically assaulted the woman.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service, investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Beth Gibson and Trial Attorney Susan French of the Civil Rights Division prosecuted the case.

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